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THE FIRST DAILY IN THE ARABIAN GULF

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**E-passport helps
Kuwait's Schengen
visa waiver bid**



**Banksy opens
Walled Off Hotel
in Bethlehem**



**Torres counts
days to return
after head clash**



150 Fils

KING SALMAN EMBRACES 'SELFIE' ON TOUR OF ASIA

LIGHTHEARTED PICS, CLIPS SHARED MILLIONS OF TIMES



Min 10°

Max 25°



JAKARTA: Indonesia's President Joko Widodo (left) presents a photo album with images from their meeting in Bogor the day before to Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdul Aziz yesterday. — AFP

JAKARTA: Saudi Arabia's King Salman has embraced the "selfie", taking part in a number of lighthearted self-shot pictures and videos during his tour of Asia that contrast with the pomp and formality of most of the monarch's trips abroad. In the first days of a lengthy regional tour, the king has appeared with top-ranking officials in Indonesia and Malaysia in pictures and clips that have been shared online millions of times.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo shared on Facebook a video of himself dining with the king at the presidential palace in Bogor, near the capital Jakarta. In the video, both men comment on the visit, the first to Indonesia by a Saudi king in nearly five decades, and give viewers a rare peek into a state event. As Widodo holds what appears to be a phone camera, the king is seen dining before commenting in Arabic on his 12-day visit to Indonesia, the longest leg of his month-long tour of Asia.

"I'm very happy to be here in Indonesia and with the Indonesian people," King Salman says to the camera, as an interpreter sitting behind him translates into Bahasa Indonesia. The king was also photographed posing for a selfie with former president Megawati Sukarnoputri and her daughter Puan Maharani, who is a member of Widodo's cabinet. Indonesia has a high concentration of Facebook and Twitter users, and selfies are a mainstay of social media in the world's fourth most populous country.

Earlier this week, Salman was seen in a selfie posted on Twitter with Prime Minister Najib Razak of Malaysia, during the first stop on his sweep across Asia. Though rare, Salman has made occasional appearances on social media before, including when he posed last year for a selfie in Qatar with a teen who survived cancer. The king is travelling with an entourage of several hundred people and nearly 500 tonnes of luggage, including two escalators. After Jakarta, the delegation is set to take a break in the resort island of Bali, where up to four hotels and 300 luxury cars have been booked for more than a week, according to local police and a tour agency association. Salman is also set to visit Brunei, China, Japan, the Maldives and Jordan — Reuters

PRESSURE MOUNTS AS SESSIONS BACKS OFF FROM RUSSIA PROBE

WASHINGTON: Attorney General Jeff Sessions may not have been clear about his contacts with Russian officials during the 2016 election, but this much is evident: The controversy over any Kremlin involvement in American politics is not going to fade away anytime soon. Sessions on Thursday became the second high-ranking member of the Trump administration to take a hit over conversations with Russia's envoy to the US, recusing himself from any probe that examines communications between Trump aides and Moscow. An early backer and key adviser for Trump's campaign, Sessions said his staff recommended that he step aside from a probe.

"I feel I should not be involved in investigating a campaign I had a role in," he said. Sessions' action followed revelations that he twice spoke with the Russian ambassador and didn't say so when pressed, under oath, by Congress. Though he rejected any suggestion that he tried to mislead anyone, he did allow that he should have been more careful

in his testimony. "I should have slowed down and said, 'But I did meet one Russian official a couple of times,'" he said.

The recusal, despite White House support for him, followed a chorus of demands that Sessions resolve the seeming contradiction between his two conversations with Moscow's US envoy, Sergey Kislyak, and his statements to Congress in January that he had not communicated with Russians during the campaign. It carried echoes of a similar controversy involving retired Gen Michael Flynn, who two weeks ago resigned as national security adviser after misleading White House officials about his own discussions with Kislyak.

Additional communication was revealed Thursday between Kislyak and Flynn and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, at New York's Trump Tower. In addition, Carter Page, a former foreign policy adviser to Trump's presidential campaign, spoke with the ambassador last summer, according to a person with knowledge of the meeting. — AP

QATAR POPULATION BOOMS ON BACK OF 2022 WORLD CUP

DOHA: Qatar's population has swollen by more than two thirds since the emirate was chosen to host the 2022 World Cup, official government figures have revealed. The country's population stands at a record 2.67 million, figures just published from the Ministry of Development, Planning and Statistics (MDPS) reveal. In Dec 2010, when it was chosen as the venue for football's biggest tournament, Qatar had a population of 1.63 million, according to the MDPS. The latest figure represents a 64 per cent increase on the 2010 population total.

The number of people living in Qatar has mushroomed as the Gulf country recruits tens of thousands laborers to work on many huge and expensive major infrastructure projects linked to the 2022 tournament. There are 2.1 million migrant laborers in Qatar - many from countries including Nepal, Bangladesh and India - according to figures announced in December by Doha's Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs. — AFP